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Experiences in nationwide recruiting for the “Allez Hop” Physical Activity Programme

Abstract

The “Allez Hop” programme has offered local physical activity courses in Switzerland from 1996 to 2008. The recruitment of course participants always was a major concern. In addition and in support to local promotion activities, nationwide recruitment measures have had an important role. Four of those are presented. The 1998 mass media campaign used billboard posters, TV spots and a strong presence in the “Health Practice” TV show. The “Health Bet” in 2002 was presented in the “Health Practice” TV show and other media and used strong financial incentives. The “Health Test” in 2003 had a less spectacular and more factual approach. In 2004, spectacular and artistically appealing TV spots were produced and broadcast in all three linguistic regions of Switzerland. 1998 saw a massive increase in the number of “Allez Hop” courses. The number of participants in the “Health Bet” was very low, the one in the “Health Test” about 10 times higher. The direct reaction to the 2004 TV spots was very limited. Possible reasons for these developments are presented and discussed in view of the data available. In future population-wide recruitment efforts evaluation should be planned along with the interventions and carried out independently from commercial partners.

Zusammenfassung

«Allez Hop» hat in den Jahren 1997 bis 2008 in der Schweiz auf lokaler Ebene Bewegungskurse angeboten. Ein wesentliches Anliegen war immer die Anwerbung von Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmern. Zusätzlich und unterstützend zu lokalen Promotionsaktivitäten spielten dabei auch Massnahmen auf nationaler Ebene eine grosse Rolle, von denen vier vorgestellt werden. 1998 wurde eine massenmediale Kampagne mit Werbeplakaten, TV-Spots und einem grossen Auftritt in der Fernsehsendung «Gesundheit Sprechstunde» durchgeführt. Die «Gesundheitswette» wurde 2002 in der «Gesundheit Sprechstunde» sowie in anderen Medien vorgestellt, sie verwendete starke finanzielle Anreize. Der «Gesundheitstest» 2003 war weniger spektakulär und verwendete einen sachlicheren und strukturierten Ansatz. 2004 wurden medientechnisch anspruchsvolle TV-Spots produziert und in allen drei Sprachregionen der Schweiz ausgestrahlt. Die Zahl der «Allez Hop»-Kurse nahm 1998 massiv zu. Die Beteiligung bei der «Gesundheitswette» war sehr gering, die beim «Gesundheitstest» etwa zehn Mal höher. Die direkte Reaktion auf die TV-Spots 2004 war sehr gering. Mögliche Gründe für diese Entwicklungen werden angesichts der vorhandenen Datenlage diskutiert. In bevölkerungsweiten Werbeaktionen für Bewegungsangebote sollte die Evaluation gemeinsam mit der Intervention geplant und unabhängig von kommerziellen Partnern durchgeführt werden.

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Introduction

Since 1995, physical inactivity has become recognised as a public health problem in Switzerland (Martin et al., 2009). In 1996, the national “Allez Hop” programme was launched as a joint initiative of three Swiss health insurance companies and the Swiss Olympic Association, the umbrella organisation of sports federations in Switzerland. Later on, the three health insurance companies were replaced by their national representative *santésuisse*, and the foundation Health Promotion Switzerland as well as the Swiss Federal Office of Sport joined the institutions behind the programme. The “Allez Hop” secretariat changed its location and institutional affiliation (Egger et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the programme ran until the end of 2008 and a total of about 18 000 local activity courses were offered. These courses went over about 10 weeks and were offered in a variety of disciplines including walking and Nordic walking. Their main objective was to enable insufficiently active individuals to adapt and maintain a physically active lifestyle (Wanner et al., 2009).

Throughout the duration of the programme, the recruitment of course participants was a major concern of “Allez Hop”. Mailings,

posters and advertisements in the media were used at the local level, often in co-operation with sport clubs, employers and other organisers. Word of mouth also played an important role. In addition and in support of these local activities, a number of publicity measures were implemented at the national level. It is the purpose of this publication to describe four of them – the mass media campaign in 1998, the “Health Bet” in 2002, the “Health Test” in 2003 and the TV spots broadcast in 2004 – and their effect on recruitment for the “Allez Hop” courses.

Methods

Monitoring activities of the “Allez Hop” secretariat

The “Allez Hop” secretariat monitored the number of courses from 1997 to the end of 2007. In 1998, “Allez Hop” did not yet have a Web site and there were no technical possibilities for monitoring the use of the preceding teletext page. The number of hits on the “Allez Hop” Web site was monitored in 2002, 2003 and 2004. The number of participants per course was estimated from

a survey carried out in qualified “Allez Hop” instructors (Stamm et al., 2007)

Mass media campaign 1998

The first “Allez Hop” media campaign was launched in March 1998 by a mailing to the media. From the last week of March until the first week of April, billboard posters were displayed in all three language regions of Switzerland. During the month of April, a TV Spot of about 20 seconds length was shown on the first channels of the national public television for the German-speaking and French-speaking parts of Switzerland as well as in four local TV stations. The spot was shown on prime time and made a link between the “Allez Hop” programme and a page on teletext where the local offers were listed (figure 1). On the evening of the first Sunday in May, the popular TV show “Health Practice” (“Gesundheit Sprechstunde”) ran an extensive feature on physical activity and health and introduced the “Allez Hop” programme. Studio guests were the national minister of sport Adolf Ogi and two experts,

A commercial demoscopic survey was carried out in July 1998 with a total sample of 500 15- to 74-year-olds, using the random quota method, for the language-assimilated population of the German- and French-speaking part of Switzerland (ISPO, 1998).

The “Health Bet” 2002

The “Health Bet” was launched in autumn 2002 with the general idea of inviting physically inactive individuals to place a bet on an increase in their physical activity behaviour over the next three months. Some examples for possible targets were given, such as joining an “Allez Hop” course, but individuals were free to set their own targets as long as they represented an increase compared to their current behaviour. The behaviour change was confirmed by witnesses chosen by the participants. All participants meeting their targets received a small present from their pharmacy and entered a lottery in the “Health Practice” TV show with very attractive prizes (a full year’s health insurance fee, a one-week wellness holiday for two in St. Moritz, a wellness weekend for two in the same place). In addition, surprise visits by TV crews were to be made to a random selection of participants. In September, the health bet was launched by the Sport Minister of that time, Samuel Schmid, in the “Health Practice” TV show (audience of up to half a million spectators), in the print magazine “Health Practice” (circulation of about 80 000 copies) as well as in the most important German-language tabloid newspaper in Switzerland (Blick) and in the national pharmacists’ magazine (figure 2). Participants were able to place their bet in 180 pharmacies (more than 10% of all pharmacies in the country). Bets were handled through the “Allez Hop” secretariat.

The “Allez Hop” secretariat analysed the number and content of the “Health Bets”, the physical activity profiles of the individuals placing the bets and their success in meeting their own behavioural targets. In a telephone-based representative population survey carried out in the adult population of Switzerland in November 2002 in the context of the evaluation of another health promotion campaign, an item on the “Health Bet” was added to a question assessing the solicited awareness of current programmes and interventions (n=1501). The December 2002 and January 2003 studio audiences of the “Health Practice” TV show were handed out a written self-administered questionnaire covering their awareness and understanding of the “Health Bet” as well as the role of potentially motivating or deterring elements.

The “Health Test” 2003

In May 2003, the “Health Test” was launched in the “Health Practice” print magazine with a short article and a questionnaire consisting of a short physical activity questionnaire and the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire PAR-Q (ACSM and AHA, 1998). All interested individuals were invited to send in their questionnaire and to receive an individual assessment of their physical activity level and health status as well as an invitation to



Figure 1: Stills from the TV spots broadcast in 1998 (left) and in 2004



Figure 2: Overview of the print media coverage of the “Health Bet” in 2003

a free one-session walking taster course organised by “Allez Hop”. The “Health Test” and the walking courses were also introduced in a short feature in the “Health Practice” TV show including a 1½ minute factual short movie, and in the national pharmacists’ magazine. The “Health Tests” were handled by the “Allez Hop” secretariat.

The “Allez Hop” secretariat analysed the questionnaire sent in by the participants, monitored participation in the taster courses and in December 2003 sent a written self-administered questionnaire to all participants.

TV spots 2004

In spring 2004, santésuisse and Health Promotion Switzerland as two of the institutions behind the “Allez Hop” programme took the initiative to produce three TV spots. In the most popular one of them, a well-known rock musician and an actor were promoting physical activity in everyday life in a very entertaining way. Towards the end of the spots, viewers were invited to call a telephone number or to visit the “Allez Hop” Web site to enquire about local offers and to register for physical activity courses (figure 1). The spots were shown repeatedly between the middle of May and middle of July. A total of 574 times, they were broadcast on the national public channels for the German-speaking, French-speaking and Italian-speaking television as well as in the advertising windows of 3 foreign satellite channels and on 15 local stations. An additional part-time collaborator was employed at the “Allez Hop” secretariat to deal with the expected telephone calls and registrations.

The number of telephone calls and registrations for courses were monitored by the “Allez Hop” secretariat. In the HEPA survey 2004, a telephone-based representative population survey carried out by the Swiss Federal Office of Sport in the adult population of Switzerland in late summer 2004, a random sub-sample (n=811) was given questions on awareness and understanding of the “Allez Hop” TV spots.

Results

Overall development in “Allez Hop” courses and Web site visits

Figure 3 shows the number of local courses as they have been registered by the “Allez Hop” secretariat for the years 1997 to 2007. In 1998, the number of courses increased by 636 (203% of the previous year), in 2002 by 364 (23%) and in 2003 by 223 (11%). In 2004, the number of courses decreased by 190 (9%). The average number of participants per course was estimated at 11.6.

In 2002, the “Allez Hop” Web site had almost 3000 visits per month. This number increased to 4100 in spring 2003. In summer 2003 the number of visits increased by about another 9%. There were about 4100 visits per month in spring 2003, whereas in autumn 2003 to winter 2004 6000 were counted. April to June 2004 had 7500 visits per month and July to September 2004 11 100.

Mass media campaign 1998

According to the commercial demoscopic survey carried out at the end of the campaign, 13.6% of Swiss adults remembered having seen the “Allez Hop” spots or the billboard posters. 12% of them reported having visited the teletextpage with the information on the local courses.

The “Health Bet” 2002

55 individuals tried to place a “Health Bet”. 20 of them had to be rejected because they were already physically active according to the definition of the organisers of the intervention. 8 of the 35 participants reported meeting their self-defined targets for behavioural change after three months. No participant took benefit of an existing “Allez Hop” course offer.

The results of the representative population survey showed a solicited awareness of 39% for the “Health Bet” for the whole of Switzerland and of 50% for the German-speaking part where the intervention was centred.

153 individuals in the audiences of the December 2002/January 2003 TV shows filled in the questionnaire which corresponded to a participation of 48%. 30% of them reported at least three sessions

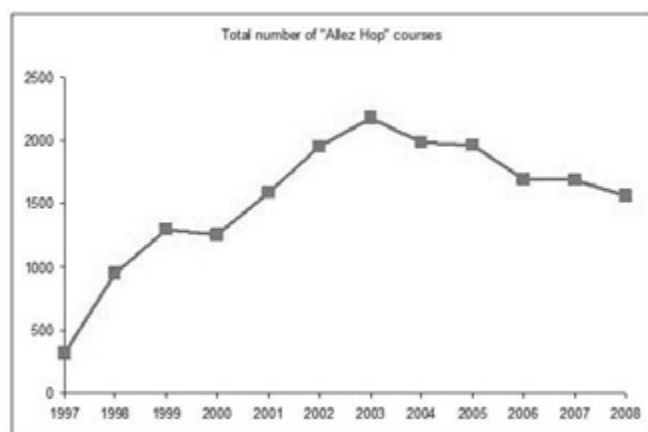


Figure 3: Development of local “Allez Hop” courses from 1997 to 2008 with indication of the nationwide recruitment measures described in this article. The average number of participants per course was estimated to be 11.6.

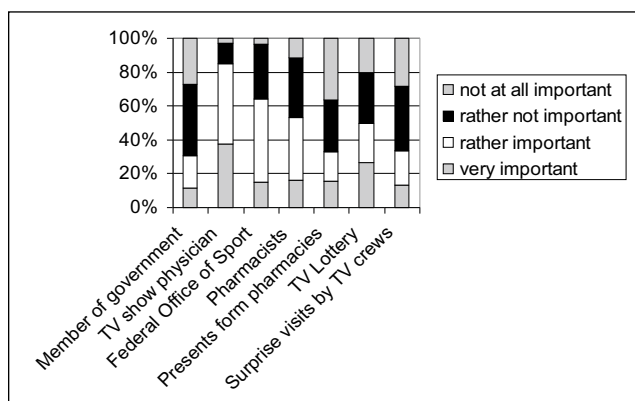


Figure 4: Relevance of the different motivational elements of the “Health Bet” according to the interviews with the audiences of the “Health Practice” shows in December 2002 and January 2003 (n=153)

of vigorous intensity activities per week and therefore met the definition of being trained, another 12% reported five days or more per week with at least half an hour of moderate intensity physical activity so that they could be counted as physically active, and the remaining 58% could be regarded as insufficiently active. 53% of all interviewees were aware of the health bet. Among them, 56% were informed about the objective of the intervention, 54% knew the target population, 38% knew that health bets could be placed with the pharmacists and 25% were informed of all three aspects. When asked whether they saw themselves as members of the target group of the intervention, the following proportion of the three categories of habitual physical activity answered “yes”: trained 39%; active 50%; insufficiently active: 48%. The interviewees were also asked about the importance they assigned to different motivational elements of the intervention, the answers are given in figure 4. A question addressed specifically the surprise visits of the TV crews to the health bet participants: A little less than 36% of the TV audience saw this element as partially motivating and partially deterring, while 33% saw it as rather or very motivating and 31% as rather or very deterring.

The “Health test” 2003

302 persons sent in the questionnaire and thus have been invited to a taster course. 20 taster courses were organised and 200 individuals attended them. 10.5% of them were trained, 14.5% physically active and 75% insufficiently active.

167 participants filled in the evaluation questionnaire in December 2003. 75 of the 167 respondents reported having attended a taster course.

TV spots 2004

17 telephone calls were received on the telephone hotline indicated in the TV spots. 6 of them were not serious and only 3 resulted in registrations for local physical activity courses.

In the representative HEPA survey, 9.5% of adults in Switzerland reported having seen the 2004 “Allez Hop” TV spots. However, when people remembering the spots were asked to define their message, nobody mentioned the possibility to register for physical activity courses. 8.0% had understood that physical activity was good for health, 2.7% that people should do more sport. All other messages – including “protect you skin from the sun” were only mentioned by single study participants. When asked about the institutions standing behind the TV spots, the Swiss Federal Office of Health – which was not involved in the project – was named by 2.7%. A number of other institutions including the Swiss health insurance companies were spontaneously mentioned by single study participants, Health Promotion Switzerland was not among them.

Discussion

The “Allez Hop” programme has been developed over 11 years and for most of this period, the number of local physical activity courses has increased. In addition and in support to local promotion activities, nationwide recruitment measures have had an important role.

“Allez Hop” has always had its focus on implementation and not on scientific research. Together with the changes in responsibilities occurred over time, this has led to a certain heterogeneity in the data sources for the four measures described in this article (*table 1*). In addition, several other events have also occurred that may have had an effect of recruitment and participation in local courses. For example in summer 2003 a link to the “Allez Hop” Web site was established on Bluewin.ch, the most popular Internet portal in Switzerland and in early spring 2004 the re-designed “Allez Hop” Web site was re-launched. Nevertheless, a number of practical conclusions can be drawn.

Out of the four measures described, only the mass media campaign in 1998 seems to have been very successful in recruiting participants for the “Allez Hop” courses. The mix of complementary communication elements, the simplicity of the messages, but also the novelty of the issue and the lack of competing offers are possible reasons for this success.

The “Health Bet” 2002 was a clear disappointment concerning both the number of individuals placing a bet and the proportion meeting their self-defined behavioural targets. Awareness and understanding of the intervention did not seem to be a problem, but explicitly and exclusively targeting physically inactive individuals and giving to little support in the form of structured offers may have been mistakes.

Despite a considerably smaller and less spectacular communication effort in comparison to the “Health Bet”, the “Health Test” 2003 recruited nearly ten times the number of participants. Not only physically inactive people, but everybody interested was targeted, nevertheless the proportion of insufficiently active individuals trying to register was even slightly higher.

The recall of the TV spots in 2004 was comparable to the ones in 1998. However, the reaction concerning telephone calls and direct registrations for courses was far below expectations and even the overall number of courses fell in this year. The artistic value of the spots was recognised by a national marketing award, but their message was not understood by the public. Other reasons for the lack of

effect might be the absence of contributions in the non-paid media and also secular trends in the interest for offers such as the “Allez Hop” courses.

Unfortunately, only the costs of the production and broadcasting of the 2004 TV spots could be quantified. Those 800 000 Swiss francs (550 000 euros) were invested in addition to the regular programme budget of annually roughly twice that amount. The costs of the 1998 mass media campaign could not be reconstructed; the other measures did not have specific budgets but were carried out based on in-kind contributions of the programme partners. Therefore a cost-effectiveness analysis of the interventions was not possible.

The development of Web site visits and the steady increase in awareness of “Allez Hop” in the general population (data not shown) are indications that even the interventions with a limited effect on participant recruitment contributed to the popularity of the programme. However, with respect to future activities and the optimal use of resources it is essential to learn lessons also from measures in population-wide recruitment of participants for physical activity offers. Evaluations efforts should be planned along with the interventions and carried out independently from commercial partners.

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Mass media campaign 1998	“Health Bet” 2002	“Health Test” 2003	TV spots 2004
• Annual course statistics	• Annual course statistics	• Annual course statistics	• Annual course statistics
• Teletext use from commercial demographic survey	• Web site statistics	• Web site statistics	• Web site statistics
• –	• Bet registrations including participants’ profile	• Test registrations including participants’ profile • Taster course registrations	• Course registrations
• Awareness from commercial demographic survey	• Awareness from population survey	• –	• Awareness from population survey
• –	• Understanding from survey in TV show audience	• –	• Understanding from population survey

Table 1: Data sources for the four measures in nationwide recruiting for the “Allez Hop” programme